

ROGER O'DONNELL, )  
 )  
 Plaintiff, )  
 )  
 v. ) No. 2:09CV00052 AGF  
 )  
 GEORGE LOMBARDI, et al., )  
 )  
 Defendants. )

This matter is before the Court upon the motion of plaintiff (registration no. 1159794), an inmate at Algoa Correctional Center, for leave to commence this action without payment of the required filing fee [Doc. #2]. For the reasons stated below, the Court finds that plaintiff does not have sufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee and will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$18.54. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). Furthermore, based upon a review of the complaint, the Court finds that the complaint should be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1), a prisoner bringing a civil action in forma pauperis is required to pay the full amount of the filing fee. If the prisoner has insufficient funds in his or her prison account to pay the entire fee, the Court must assess and, when funds exist, collect an initial partial filing fee of 20 percent of the

greater of (1) the average monthly deposits in the prisoner's account, or (2) the average monthly balance in the prisoner's account for the prior six-month period. After payment of the initial partial filing fee, the prisoner is required to make monthly payments of 20 percent of the preceding month's income credited to the prisoner's account. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The agency having custody of the prisoner will forward these monthly payments to the Clerk of Court each time the amount in the prisoner's account exceeds \$10, until the filing fee is fully paid. Id.

Plaintiff has submitted an affidavit and a certified copy of his prison account statement for the six-month period immediately preceding the submission of his complaint. A review of plaintiff's account indicates an average monthly deposit of \$92.70, and an average monthly balance of \$8.61. Plaintiff has insufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee. Accordingly, the Court will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$18.54, which is 20 percent of plaintiff's average monthly deposit.

#### **28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)**

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), the Court must dismiss a complaint filed in forma pauperis if the action is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. An action is frivolous if it "lacks an arguable basis in either law or fact." Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 328 (1989). An action is malicious if it is

undertaken for the purpose of harassing the named defendants and not for the purpose of vindicating a cognizable right. Spencer v. Rhodes, 656 F. Supp. 458, 461-63 (E.D.N.C. 1987), aff'd 826 F.2d 1059 (4th Cir. 1987).

To determine whether an action fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, the Court must engage in a two-step inquiry. First, the Court must identify the allegations in the complaint that are not entitled to the assumption of truth. Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1950-51 (2009). These include “legal conclusions” and “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action [that are] supported by mere conclusory statements.” Id. at 1949. Second, the Court must determine whether the complaint states a plausible claim for relief. Id. at 1950-51. This is a “context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.” Id. at 1950. The plaintiff is required to plead facts that show more than the “mere possibility of misconduct.” Id. The Court must review the factual allegations in the complaint “to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.” Id. at 1951. When faced with alternative explanations for the alleged misconduct, the Court may exercise its judgment in determining whether plaintiff’s conclusion is the most plausible or whether it is more likely that no misconduct occurred. Id. at 1950, 51-52.

## **The Complaint**

Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging violations of his civil rights. Named as defendants are: George Lombardi (Acting Director, Missouri Department of Corrections); Correctional Medical Services (“CMS”); Dr. Cameron (Acting Doctor at Moberly Correctional Center); J. Cofield (Regional Manager of CMS); and M. Sands (Regional Medical Director for CMS). Plaintiff challenges actions taken by defendants in September, 2008, when plaintiff was confined at the Moberly Correctional Center (“MCC”) in Moberly, Missouri. In support of his claim, plaintiff has attached copies of grievances and appeals he filed concerning that time period. Plaintiff contends that defendants were deliberately indifferent to his serious medical needs and pain resulting from a previous injury and subsequent surgery to his right hand by Dr. Cameron while plaintiff was confined at MCC. Plaintiff seeks unspecified monetary damages and injunctive relief.

## **Discussion**

The complaint is silent as to whether defendants Lombardi, Cameron, Cofield and Sands are being sued in their official or individual capacities. Where a “complaint is silent about the capacity in which [plaintiff] is suing defendant, [a district court must] interpret the complaint as including only official-capacity claims.” Egerdahl v. Hibbing Community College, 72 F.3d 615, 619 (8th Cir.1995); Nix v. Norman, 879 F.2d 429,

431 (8th Cir. 1989). Naming a government official in his or her official capacity is the equivalent of naming the government entity that employs the official. Defendant Lombardi is employed by the State of Missouri. Will v. Michigan Dept. of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989). “[N]either a State nor its officials acting in their official capacities are ‘persons’ under § 1983.” Id. As a result, the complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted with respect to defendant Lombardi.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the complaint fails to state a claim against defendants Cameron, Cofield and Sands, who, by virtue of their employment with CMS, are considered “government officials” for the purposes of § 1983. See, e.g., West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 49 (1988); Crooks v. Nix, 872 F.2d 800, 804 (8th Cir. 1989). To state a claim against a government official in his or her official capacity, plaintiff must allege that a policy or custom of the governmental entity is responsible for the alleged constitutional violation. Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91 (1978). The

---

<sup>1</sup>Plaintiff’s claims against defendant Lombardi fail for yet another reason. “Liability under § 1983 requires a causal link to, and direct responsibility for, the alleged deprivation of rights.” Madewell v. Roberts, 909 F.2d 1203, 1208 (8th Cir. 1990); see also Martin v. Sargent, 780 F.2d 1334, 1338 (8th Cir. 1985) (claim not cognizable under § 1983 where plaintiff fails to allege defendant was personally involved in or directly responsible for incidents that injured plaintiff); Boyd v. Knox, 47 F.3d 966, 968 (8th Cir. 1995)(respondeat superior theory inapplicable in § 1983 suits). In the instant action, plaintiff has not set forth any facts indicating that defendant Lombardi was directly involved in or personally responsible for the alleged violations of his constitutional rights.

instant complaint does not contain any allegations that a policy or custom of CMS was responsible for the alleged violations of plaintiff's constitutional rights. As a result, the complaint fails to state a claim against defendants Cameron, Cofield and Sands. In this same vein, plaintiff also fails to state a claim against CMS.

Although naming CMS as a defendant, plaintiff has not alleged facts showing any action by CMS. Instead, his claims against this corporate defendant appear to rely on the doctrine of respondeat superior. "It is well settled that respondeat superior cannot be the basis of liability in a § 1983 action." Givens v. Jones, 900 F.2d 1229, 1233 (8th Cir.1990).

Likewise, as noted above, plaintiff has not alleged a policy by CMS that caused his injuries. In Sanders v. Sears Roebuck and Company, 984 F.2d 972 (8th Cir.1993), the court held that a corporation acting under color of state law will be held liable under section 1983 only for its own unconstitutional policies or actions. "The proper test is whether there is a policy, custom or action by those who represent official policy that inflicts injury actionable under § 1983." Id.; 984 F.2d at 976. Thus, to state a viable claim against CMS for an injury caused by an unconstitutional policy, plaintiff must allege facts indicating that the defendants employed by CMS acted pursuant to an official CMS policy and the official policy is responsible for plaintiff being denied

constitutionally adequate medical care. In this case, plaintiff has not done so. Thus, his claims against CMS fail to survive initial review.

Accordingly,

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that plaintiff's motion to proceed in forma pauperis [Doc. #2] is **GRANTED**.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that the plaintiff shall pay an initial filing fee of \$18.54 within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order. Plaintiff is instructed to make his remittance payable to "Clerk, United States District Court," and to include upon it: (1) his name; (2) his prison registration number; (3) the case number; and (4) that the remittance is for an original proceeding.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that the Clerk shall not issue process or cause process to issue upon the complaint because the complaint is legally frivolous or fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or both.

An Order of Dismissal will accompany this Memorandum and Order.

So Ordered this 5th day of November, 2009.



---

E. RICHARD WEBBER  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE